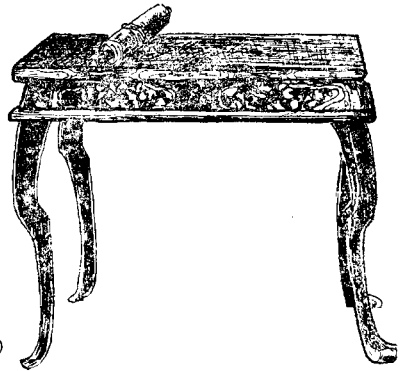


THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

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On September 28, 1956, two weeks after my arrival in Japan, I went in the company of five other foreigners to visit the headquarters of the Tenri-kyo sect near the city of Nara, the ancient capital of Japan. I had some knowledge of Japan's so-called "New Religions"^a and of Tenri-kyo^a in particular prior to going to that country, but what little I knew had not led me to expect what I saw and experienced that day. There on the historic Yamato Plain the devotees of this sect are developing an astonishingly completed and elaborate "world" headquarters.

Cordially received by the officials of Tenri-kyo and assigned knowledgeable guides, we were privileged

to inspect in detail the various installations and the life that centers in them. Two great sanctuaries, built in the impressive architectural style which usually is associated with Japanese Buddhism, are at the heart of the area; indeed, they are presumed to stand at the very center of the universe, where the original creation of man occurred. One is dedicated to the worship of Tenri-O-no-Mikoto,^b the God of Tenri-kyo; while the other is the abode of the living spirit of the foundress of the sect, Mrs. Nakayama Miki.^c

Otherwise, the headquarters precinct includes a complete school system (kindergarten to university), a library of 600,000 volumes, a publishing house, an ethnological

a. 天理教 b. 天理王命 c. 中山みき

* For a comment on this term see page

. Ed.

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museum, dormitories to accommodate (in Japanese fashion) more than 150,000 people, dining halls for thousands, a hospital and sanitarium, an olympic-style swimming pool, and numerous office buildings and residences.

Wherever we went we encountered eager, devoted people for whom Tenri City is the center of the universe. Most of them were wearing the traditional black *happi*^a coat with the name of the sect on the back and the name of their local church on the lapel. Having come as pilgrims from all parts of Japan, they were occupied in a variety of ways. Some devotees were at worship; others were receiving instruction; a few were just seeing the sights; and perhaps the majority were engaged in "consecrated labor," their voluntary contribution to the maintenance or improvement of the sacred precinct. Buildings, people, activities—all combined to give an impression of intense religious vitality.

My amazement at what I had seen and experienced at Tenri was heightened later that day, when,

on our return journey, we stopped briefly at Horyuji,^b the oldest Buddhist temple in Japan. Lovely, quiet, hoary, this temple is seldom now the goal of earnest pilgrimages. Maintained in part and protected by the government as a "national treasure," it is more a museum than a religious center. The visitors are largely sightseers, school children on excursions, photographers, and picnickers. The priests are ticket sellers and ticket takers, vendors of pictures, post cards and religious articles, and guardians of the artistic treasures.

To me, having my initial face-to-face experience with these two aspects of Japanese religion, the contrast between Tenri and Horyuji was startling. Are Japan's New Religions displacing the old ones? Is Buddhism in Japan as passé as Horyuji? Actually, as I was to discover, neither Tenri-kyo nor Horyuji is completely typical of that branch of Japanese religion which it represents. Tenri-kyo, founded in 1838 and now numbering upwards of 1,500,000 adherents, is the oldest, largest, and most in-

a. 法被 b. 法隆寺 * As of Dec. 31, 1958 the total was 2,047,000. Ed.

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fluent of all the New Religions. Horyuji, on the other hand, is one of three nominal "head" temples of the almost defunct Hosso^a sect which passed the zenith of its religious vitality over a thousand years ago. Not all of the new sects are flourishing, and not all of the old sects are decadent. Nevertheless, in character, if not in intensity, this experience proved to be an accurate orientation in one important aspect of the religious life of present-day Japan. The old traditional religions, failing to demonstrate their relevance to current needs, are losing much of their vitality. The New Religions, accepting as their mission the assuagement of those needs, are mushrooming in number, in size, and in *apparent* effectiveness.

As a group these sects often are designated as *Shinko-Shukyo* ("Newly-arisen Religions"), but, inasmuch as many of the leaders of the sects now regard this term as one of opprobrium, it seems desirable rather to refer to them as *Shin-Shukyo* ("New Religions"). Together they constitute a socio-religious

phenomenon which has come to particular prominence since the end of World War II. However, it is important to remark immediately that these sects are not in every instance really new. For example, two of the largest and most active sects are Tenri-kyo and Konko-kyo, each of which has been in existence for about a century and formerly was officially recognized and registered as a sect of Shinto. Furthermore, many other currently active sects are essentially revivals of abortive movements that have appeared at various times during the past half century or so. Actually, very few of these sects are of postwar origin.

One of the most significant facts to note in this whole matter is that, prior to the end of World War II, Japan never had had real freedom of religion. For at least a hundred and fifty years the underlying social conditions in Japan have been such as to encourage the rise of new religions, but for much of that time, particularly during the last seventy-five years, the policies of the government have been aimed at

a. 法相

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checking their growth. The guarantee of religious freedom in the Meiji Constitution of 1889 was little more than a propaganda device to relieve the anxiety of Western powers who were troubled by occasional acts of Japanese hostility toward Christians. In actual practice the government set up certain categories of religious bodies, which it was willing to recognize, and then required that all religious movements register and operate within one or another of these. Hence, at the end of World War II, when complete freedom of religion was established as one of the cardinal principles in Japan's new day, the "lid was off" and the way was open for innumerable incipient movements to become independent sects, for "prophets" to let their voices be heard, for charlatans and quacks to have their day.

Actually it is impossible to determine exactly how many New Religions there are. In part this is due to the fact that there is some disagreement concerning what constitutes *the* "New Religions" or *a* "New Religion." A proffered general

working definition of the latter has been phrased as follows:

[A "New Religion" is] a religious organization, operating on a denominational level outside the so-called established religions, which has created its own special system of teachings with a somewhat unique emphasis and has come into existence in recent years, particularly in the post war period.¹

This statement, however, failing to specify clearly unambiguous criteria serves better as an illustration of a judgmentic quandary than as a definition. For example, how is one to determine when a movement of a Shintoistic or Buddhistic origin ceases to be a subset of Shinto or Buddhism and becomes a New Religion? Again, in a cultural history as old as that of Japan, what is the relative meaning of "recent years"?

In my own approach to this study I am inclined to think that the term "New Religions" is useful primarily as a designation for a widespread socio-religious movement, which is manifested phenomenologically in scores, perhaps hundreds, of diverse sects and

¹ Quoted by William P. Woodard, "Japan's New Religions," *Japan Harvest*, V (1957), p. 18.

subjects. It is my opinion, therefore, that the effort to define *the* "New Religions" or a "New Religion" is somewhat irrelevant. It is perhaps more to the point to inquire, concerning the whole welter of these sects and subsects, whether and to what extent it is valid to consider them generically and to seek among them certain recurrent factors which may be singled out as the characteristics of a broad movement, largely irrespective of the age or degree of independence of any particular group under examination. On the basis of my own limited research, I am ready to affirm that such a consideration and such a search are valid. Subsequently I shall analyze the New Religions from this perspective, but first I want to describe briefly seven sects with which I had some contact during ten months in Japan. It is important that this be done at this point, for these sects are fairly representative of the total range of the New Religions and they constitute the major evidential basis for my later generalizations and analyses. These seven sects, in the order of their

description, are Tenri-kyo Konkokyo, Seicho-no-je, PL Kyodan, Ittōen, Rissho-kosei-kai, and Sōka Gakkai.

Representative New Religions

1. *Tenri-kyo*

As we have noted already, the oldest of the religions called "new" is Tenri-kyo. Founded among peasants in 1838 by Mrs. Nakayama Miki (1798-1887), it must be considered in certain respects as the precursor of the New Religions, in other respects as one of them.

The foundress was a remarkable woman—so remarkable, indeed, that she is believed by the faithful to have been the manifestation of God on earth. Many of the words which she spoke—often while in a trance—have been recorded as revelation; and the deeds which she performed and the ceremonies which she devised have become the pattern of Tenri-kyo life and worship. Much of her effort was directed to healing, the success of which attracted numerous followers; but her activities also aroused the suspicions of the government and led to considerable harrassment from

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that quarter. This latter was occasioned in part by the fact that the rise of Tenri-kyo was synchronous with a wave of peasant revolts. Indeed, there seems to have been some correlation between nascent Tenri-kyo and certain ecstatic dances inaugurated by peasant groups who claimed to have seen lucky charms falling from the sky as earnest for the success of their demands for freedom. The dances were followed on occasion by fanatical rioting.²

Tenri-kyo has had a checkered history. While it is now an independent religion, at various times it has been registered, according to governmental directives, as a sect of Buddhism and of Shinto. Indeed, because of its inclusion as one of the thirteen bodies of Sectarian Shinto, recognized by the Meiji government in 1882, it still is often classified as a Shinto sect.* This, however, is a designation which does not please the present leaders of the movement.

The doctrine of Tenri-kyo is simple and practical. The worship

of the sect is directed to Tenri-O-no-Mikoto ("Lord of Divine Wisdom"), conceived as the sole existent deity, who is the creator of all things and the gracious sustainer of life. He is characteristically referred to as *Oya-Gami* ("God the Parent"). This God chose Nakayama Miki as his dwelling and by her reveals his purpose and will to his children. He calls them to live a happy and peaceful life as brothers and sisters one of the other. To those who have not found such a life he gives opportunities for reform. He sends warnings in the form of disease or other misfortune. These are not punitive in character but are intended to guide errant ones to a careful self-reflection. He teaches them that their lives have lost their luster because of an accumulation of "dust" resulting from their enslavement to self-interest in this life, or perhaps in some previous existence. (This undoubtedly reflects a Japanese housewife's effort to describe the operation of the well-known Bud-

² Hideo Kishimoto (ed.) *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1956), pp. 320, 326.

* Tenri-kyō itself was not so recognized by the national government until 1908. Ed.

a. 親神

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dhist concept of *Karma*). This hindrance must be swept away if one wishes to attain *yoki-gurashi*^a ("the joyous life"). There are several aids to this accomplishment. Foremost among them is the Foundress, who as teacher and exemplar, is the divine model of life. Also, participation in the rites which she ordained and the performance of *hinokishin*^b ("devoted labor") are particularly efficacious in achieving purification. *Yoki-gurashi*, the goal, is in part an apocalyptic ideal, in part a present attainment. It describes an eventual day of peace when all the world will return to God the Parent; it also is the good life of the present when by God's enabling grace the mind has been made pure.

In its organization Tenri-kyo is very highly centralized. At the head of the sect is the *Shimba shira*^c ("Patriarch"), a descendant of the foundress. The third Patriarch, currently in office, is Nakayama Shozen,^d the great grandson of Miki San. He is the chief teacher and priest for the world membership of Tenri-kyo. In Japan

alone there are about 15,000 churches, each of which is subsidiary to one of 120 "main" churches, and all are responsible ultimately to the headquarters at Tenri City. In addition to these, Tenri-kyo churches also have been established abroad, especially in other Asian lands, at the time of Japan's occupation of them, and in countries of the Western Hemisphere where there is a substantial Japanese immigrant population. Pastors and missionaries for all these churches are trained in Tenri University. Indeed, it is significant that this university was organized in 1926 as a school of foreign languages for the training of missionaries, and did not attain university status until 1949.

An individual becomes a member of Tenri-kyo simply by enrolling in one of the churches and making a financial contribution. His membership is then announced and he agrees to remove the *Butsudane*^e ("Buddha shelf") from his home and replace it with the Tenri shelf, objects for which are supplied by headquarters. He will be ministered

a. 陽気ぐらし b. ひのきしん c. 真柱 d. 中山正善 e. 仏壇

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to by the *kyoshi*,^a the teacher or pastor of the local church, but he is encouraged to think of Tenri as the real Mecca of his religious life. Ideally, he will make a pilgrimage there once a month at his own expense and, on occasion, spend several days there engaged voluntarily in construction or maintenance work. In any event, he will try to visit there at some time on one of the two major annual festivals. These are held on October 26th and January 26th, commemorating respectively the founding of Tenri-kyo and the death of the Foundress. Normally about 100,000 persons gather for these occasions. I was present for the fall observance in 1956 and was thoroughly amazed by the apparent ease with which this throng of pilgrims was accommodated in the dormitories and dining halls. Another impressive feature on this occasion was the display of more than 15,000 lanterns, each one of which had been contributed by, and inscribed with the name of, a local Tenri-

kyo church. These were mounted in double-decked rows along the major thoroughfares of Tenri, where they shone as a beautiful and spectacular reminder of the size and scope of the religion.

Nearly all of the devotees of Tenri-kyo are peasants or laborers. However, there are indications that conscious efforts are being made to gain a favorable hearing among more sophisticated groups. To this end, in part, a large library is maintained, which includes a number of rare volumes from both the East and the West and a remarkable collection of books on Christian missions.³ Furthermore, by the ready admission of the leaders of the sect, their doctrines are being amplified by gleanings from Christianity and other major religions. In addition, as the sect has established hospitals in recent years, they have been staffed by qualified medical doctors, who in most instances are not members of Tenri-kyo. While the reports persist that in the outreach of the local churches,

³ These items are listed in a *Catalogue of Special Books on Christian Missions* (2 volumes, Tenri-kyo Press, 1955).

a. 教師

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faith-healing practices of a rather bizarre sort continue, in the hospitals no ritual technique is employed. Finally, the present Shimbashira is a man of considerable culture who usually impresses quite favorably his rather frequent "distinguished" visitors. He has traveled abroad extensively. He is a bibliophile and a man of discerning artistic tastes. One of the finest ethnological museums in Japan has been established at Tenri City, largely through the efforts and encouragement of the Shimbashira. Thus, although the main strength of Tenri-kyo is among the unsophisticated masses, in its aspiration to become a world faith, it is seeking that level of maturity which will enable it to a wider and more erudite audience.

2. *Konko-kyo*

Approximating Tenri-kyo in both age and popularity is Konko-kyo.^a It, too, was founded among peasants by a peasant, but now has its greatest strength in urban areas. The movement was born in 1859, when

Kawade Bunjiro^b (1814—1883),⁴ an uneducated farmer, emerged from a serious illness convinced that he had been called to be "the medium of communication" between mankind and God. In this conviction, at the age of fifty-five, he abandoned his life as a farmer and became a minister of religion.

As in the case of Tenri-kyo, Konko-kyo is listed among the thirteen Shinto Sects which were recognized by the Meiji government.* Here again, however, the designation is a questionable one. In a conversation with a priest of the sect in Osaka, I asked about the adequacy of this classification. In substance his reply was that, if a religion originating in Japan must be classed as Shinto, then Konko-kyo is Shinto; however, the God worshiped in this sect is not a deity of old Shinto. This is an important distinction. Konko-kyo is devoted to Tenchi-Kane-no-Kami,^c the great father of the universe, a God who revealed himself first to the founder.

⁴ There are many variant ways of referring to the founder of Konko-kyo, including alternative renderings of his personal name and honorific appellations. He is known as Bunjiro Konko, Konko-Daijin, Ikigami-Konko-Daijin, Ikigami-Konko-Okami, and Shin-jin Bun.

a. 金光教 b. 河出文次郎 c. 天地金之神 * in 1900. Ed.

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Early in the Meiji period, in compliance with a governmental decree, the sect adopted three Shinto deities as manifestations of their one God, since no sect could be recognized officially and be permitted to exist unless it had Shinto deities. However, when this requirement was lifted in 1946,[†] the three extraneous gods were dropped. Now Konko-kyo is virtually monotheistic, although in its tolerance of the worship of other sects it refuses to deny outright the existence of their gods. Nevertheless, the sect does have certain real affinities to Shinto. These are perhaps most obvious in certain ceremonies, when the garb of the officiants, the altar furnishings, and the food offerings made to the deity are all in the traditional Shinto pattern.

The teachings of this sect are simple but strongly theistic. God is the creator of heaven and earth. All life is sustained by grace, which is the manifestation of divine virtue. No person is born by human power; he cannot heal his own illnesses; he cannot control himself by his own free will. He lives and acts

only by the grace of God, who as the Divine Parent, cares for his children in life and in death. God has called mankind *Ujiko*^a ("children of one family"), thereby proclaiming his parental love and, at the same time, enjoining his devotees to love each other and to pray for the welfare of all and for the peace of the world. Such love and prayerful concern, which conduce to happiness and prosperity, are both the duties and the fruits of faith. On the other hand, ignorance of God's love and violation of his commandments are the causes of suffering.

In contrast to some of the other New Religions, Konko-kyo repudiates many of the baser aspects of popular religion, such as magic, divination, and exorcism. Rather it places major stress on diligence in attending the services of worship and listening attentively to the sermons. It insists that faith be sincere and that it be manifested in daily life.

My own contacts with Konko-kyo were limited to two visits to a large church in Osaka, a major

a. 氏子 † in 1945. Ed.

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industrial city, where the sect seems to be especially strong. I was most impressed by the pattern of worship. There services are held daily, at 6:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m. The times have been set with a view to accommodating the laboring people. Between three and four hundred worshipers are in attendance at each service. Except on festival occasions, when the priests of several churches join forces and make food offerings to the God, the service is not elaborate. It consists mainly of prayers, some of which are chanted at length in unison with a most impressive effect. The service is followed by a sermon. Overall, Konko-kyo gives the impression that it possesses a strong core of sincere piety, of honest self-inspection, and of benevolent social concern.

3. *Seicho-no-Ie*

The sect which has attracted the greatest number of adherents from among the intelligentsia is Seicho-

no-Ie^a ("House of Growth"), which has a membership of about 1,000,000. The founder is Taniguchi Masaharu, who, since 1930, has parlayed his studies in various religions and his skill in writing first into a successful publishing business and, subsequently, into a flourishing religious movement. Though he has at times achieved some notoriety for his remarkable vacillations with the winds of opportunism (he was for a time an ultra-nationalist and supporter of Emperor worship) his skill as a writer has enabled him to escape stigmatization. He is today one of Japan's most prolific authors. His output includes a multi-volume Scripture for his sect and innumerable other books, tracts, and magazines in both Japanese and English. He has published one major work in English, *Divine Education and Spiritual Training of Mankind*, to which five "forewords" have been contributed by leaders of various "divine science" movements in the United States.⁵ A

⁵ The Scripture of Seicho-no-Ie is *Seimei-no-Jisso* ("Truth of Life") which according to an advertisement in the sect's monthly magazine, *Seicho-no-Ie* (Vol. VI, No. 4, April, 1957), has sold 8,000,000 copies in the past twenty-five years. *Divine Education and Spiritual Training of Mankind* (Tokyo: Seicho-no-Ie Foundation, Divine Publication Department 1956) is described as the "essence"

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careful peruser of both Christian and Buddhist literature, Taniguchi has borrowed copiously from both sources and has worked literary wonders with his gleanings. The nature and impact of this work are aptly indicated in the statement of a young Japanese scholar in commenting on the attraction of "brightly refurbished teachings from the old religions, done in beautifully refined passages."⁶

The message of Seicho-no-Ie is beamed to the people at a conscious-need level. Ill health, strained husband-wife and in-law relations, and behavior problems in children are typical subjects of concern. Taniguchi's diagnosis and therapy in all such cases are based on the principle that man is a child of God created for happiness in an "Edenic Paradise" attainable in this world. Illness has only an apparent reality. It is simply an illusion which results from a lack of gratitude. Similarly, other untoward situations

are actually the reflections of the mind of an ungrateful or bitter person. Hence, healing comes by the rectification of the mind through faith in God.

It is my impression, derived from reading some of the literature of Seicho-no-Ie and attending one of their meetings, that there are three techniques in particular by which "saving faith" may be attained. The first is reading the Scripture and related literature. In the reported case histories which I have read, it is not always clear whether the efficacy of this practice is more related to understanding or to merit. The second technique calls for the repetition of an expression of gratitude (*arigato gozaimasu*, "thank you") until a genuine sense of gratitude both to and for persons and things becomes a reality. Finally, when evidence of healing is discernible, the beneficiary is enjoined to testify to its reality and the manner of its achievement, both to

of *Seimei-no-jisso* in an English translation. When visiting the sect's headquarters in Tokyo, I asked an attendant at the book stall how many books Taniguchi had written. He replied that he did not know and that he did not suppose that the Founder himself knew.

⁶ Kobayashi Sakae, "Changes in the Japanese Religions after World War II" (Unpublished STM Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1957), p. 98.

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make the new faith secure and to witness to others in their needs.

While these three seem to be the most clearly sanctioned techniques, there are also admonitions to pray and apparent admissions of the usefulness of spiritualism and other occult forms.

It is my understanding that, apart from the gatherings at the modern headquarters building in Tokyo, most meetings of Seicho-no-Ie are held in private homes, I was a visitor in one such meeting, which was attended by about seventy-five people and was addressed by a university professor. The program was preceded by the unison recitation of portions of the Scripture, in which each new arrival joined as

he had seated himself on the floor. When all were assembled, an official introduced the speaker who then spoke for two hours and a quarter in a most vivid manner. His speech was followed by a number of personal testimonies, relating stories of illness and family tension which had been cleared up by the development of a sense of gratitude. These were remarkable utterances, partly because of their intense emotional undertones and partly also because such frankness in revealing one's inner struggles seems so atypical of the Japanese. The meeting was concluded with a period of informal fellowship and the serving of refreshments.

(To be continued)

Note: In reprinting this essay, as in the original, there are no vowel marks in the Japanese words. Ed.